

A Very Modest Proposal: The Teamster election, Fight for \$15 at UPS, and the ISO
by Joe Allen. For 2016 ISO convention.

The international election for the top officers of the Teamsters is the most important union election scheduled for 2016. The election takes place at an important crossroad in the future of the union and the logistics industry in North America. There is great discontent and anxiety among the rank and file over multiple issues including: the ongoing pension crisis, the concessionary bargaining under the current leadership under James P. Hoffa, Jr ("Junior Hoffa") and Ken Hall, the burgeoning non-union sectors of the logistics industry, and the lack of competent leadership throughout the union. Fred Zuckerman (Louisville Local 89) and Tim Sylvester (New York Local 804) are challenging Hoffa and Hall for General President and Secretary-Treasurer, and are running on a program of reversing the decline of the union.

What does the Teamster election mean for ISO? I think it is important for several reasons. As I have put forward in two articles in Jacobin, my 2015 convention document Logistics and Socialist Strategy, and the Big Brown series in Socialist Worker, logistics workers have the potential to be the most powerful section of the industrial working class in North America. After thirty plus years of gut-wrenching changes to basic industry (auto, steel, electrical, and transportation) a new configuration of the industrial working class has emerged in the United States. Logistics companies are central to the functioning of the modern industrial economy. UPS, where much of the election contest will take place, is one of the most important logistics companies in the world, and unique because, unlike many logistics companies, it is heavily unionized. It is the largest single unionized, private sector employer in the country with 250,000 workers covered by the National Master Teamster-UPS contract, and the Chicago-based Local 710 and Local 705 contracts.

UPS is an extremely complicated and contradictory workplace. It has both some of the highest paid unionized workers in the country and some of the lowest paid (\$10.00 start pay for part-timers) in the country. Part-timers make up to two-thirds of the workforce at UPS. The Teamsters were the heroes of the labor movement under the reform leadership of the Ron Carey when in 1997 they led a nationwide strike that took on and defeated UPS. The key issues were fulltime jobs, low pay and stopping the pension swindle. However, the last seventeen years under Hoffa has seriously weakened the union in previous strongholds

including carhaul, grocery, and UPS. Opposition to Hoffa has expressed itself by the repeated voting down of Hoffa-negotiated contracts and supplements (local contracts to national agreements) especially at UPS. However, Tim Sylvester was also defeated for reelection in a close four-way race for Local 804 president. He's returned to his previous job at UPS and will campaign for national office as a rank and filer.

The upcoming 2018 National Teamster-UPS (along with the local contracts and supplements) has the potential to be a real battle and, depending on who is leading the union, a potential strike. Tim Sylvester and other activists in the Teamsters have talked about bringing the Fight for \$15 campaign into UPS. As we know the Fight for \$15 has been one of the most vibrant trade union-allied campaigns in recent years, and such a campaign at UPS could have a major impact on the entire low-waged based logistics industry especially at Amazon. We did a lot of great work during the Teamsters 1997 UPS campaign and strike that I'm still extremely proud of but we haven't done any systematic work around the Teamsters and UPS for many years, so I want to make a very modest proposal to this year's convention:

That two or three members in each of the big three districts (Chicago, New York, and the Bay Area) form a small fraction to sell Socialist Worker at the appropriate UPS hub or Teamster membership meeting, familiarize themselves with the leading reform activists in the city, and report on the state of the work on a regular basis. Furthermore, that the print edition of Socialist Work carry an article on the Teamster election and or UPS in each edition from July through December of this year.

Looking to the future of the ISO's trade union work, I hope we can begin some political work at the Teamsters, and the logistics industry that we can build on over the next decade.

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For further reading:

How to Beat the Big Brown Machine by Mary Deaton
Collision: How the rank and file took back the Teamsters by Ken Crowe
Rank and File Rebellion: Teamsters for Democratic Union by Dan La Botz
The Tumultuous Teamsters by Dan La Botz in Rebel Rank and File edited by Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner, and CaL Winslow